



NMFS CRISP: Critical Sightings Program

Please help the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) collect vital information on right whales, and dead, entangled, or injured whales of any species by contacting either the Northeast or Southeast Regional hotlines **immediately** when critical sightings are made. Images of critical sightings are extremely valuable. **Please make taking video or photographs a priority.**

If an **entangled** or **dead whale** is sighted, please keep the whale in sight after reporting unless the NMFS responders request otherwise. **Do not attempt to disentangle a whale unless authorized.**

If a **right whale** is sighted, please look for signs of entanglement. There is no need to keep the whale in sight if no entanglement was seen.

Reporting Strategy

For any critical sighting be prepared with the following information:

- T Time and location of the sighting
- T Distinctive features of the animal and its estimated length
- T Signs of injury or entanglement
- T Description of behavior and injuries
- T If the whale is dead, the condition of the carcass
- T How you can be contacted

In the **Southeast Region** (includes the Gulf of Mexico) report all critical sightings by calling this pager: **305-862-2850** Report right whale sightings **only** in the **FACSFACJAX Area** by calling **904- 542-2004**

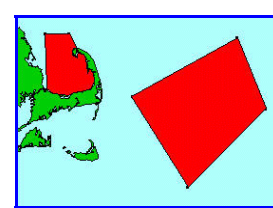
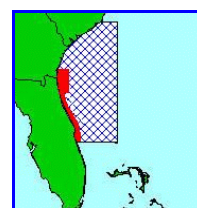
In the **Northeast Region** call the appropriate pager:

Entangled whales: **800-900-3622**

Dead, ship-struck or injured whales: **978-585-7149**

Right whale sightings: **978-585-8473**

In both Regions, reports can also be relayed through U.S. Coast Guard stations



Northeast Region: ME - VA and offshore north of 36°E35'N

Southeast Region: TX - NC and offshore south of 36°E35'N

 **FACSJAX area** (33°E00'N to 28°E00'N out to 78°E30'W)

 **Right Whale Critical Habitat areas:****

Great South Channel: 41°E00'N,69°E05'W;

41°E45'N,69°E45'W; 42°E10'N,68°E31'W; 41°E38'N,68°E13'W

Cape Cod Bay: 42°E04.8'N,70°E10'W; 42°E12'N/70°E15'W;

42°E12'N,70°E30'W; 41°E46.8'N,70°E30'W

Southeast: 31°E15'N to 30°E15'N & offshore 15 nm;

30°E15'N to 28°E00'N & offshore 5 nm

****Right whales follow a migratory path close to shore along the entire U.S. eastern seaboard. This migration is primarily in the early spring and late fall. See the U.S. Coast Pilot for more information on right whale distribution throughout the year and the **Mandatory Ship Reporting (MSR)** systems in both the Southeast and Northeast Regions.**

Identifying Right Whales

Several features should be observed to confirm species identification. These may include:

- T Rough white patches ('callosities') on head
- T Dorsal fin absent when the whale arches on a dive (but be cautious--other species may not show their dorsal fin until they arch up for a deep dive)
- T Flukes have smooth trailing edges and taper gradually to narrow pointy tips (only right whales, humpbacks and sperm whales routinely lift their tails when diving)
- T Distinct 'V' shaped blow when viewed from directly behind or head on (but not from the side)

From the air, right whales are best identified by the presence of the callosities on the head. Their body shape is more robust than other whale species, and the flukes are proportionally larger. The flippers are typically hard to see.



Right whale head showing 'callosities'
NEFSC/PSB



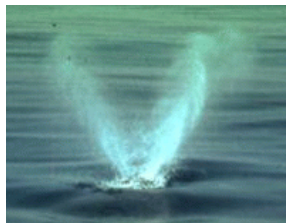
Right whale aerial view
NEFSC/PSB



Right whale flukes
NEFSC/PSB



Humpback flukes
NEFSC/PSB



Right whale 'V' shaped blow
NEFSC/PSB



Blow of other species
Scott Hill, NOAA Corps

(continued on back)

Spotting Entangled Whales

Spotting entangled whales requires careful observation. Whenever a whale is sighted, look for buoys or lines moving or unusually clumped near the whale or trailing some distance behind. Gear may also be seen wrapped over the whale's back, flippers, tail stock, or through the mouth.

Photographs or video of an entanglement are extremely valuable, especially when they document areas where the gear is entangled on the whale

Be sure to stay well clear of an entangled whale to avoid spooking it or running over any trailing gear.

Identifying Dead Whale Species at Sea

Whale carcasses are typically seen floating belly up. Due to predation and weathering, carcasses may differ significantly from the pictures below. Rely on described body structures for identification. If possible, closely examine the carcass for signs of injuries, such as gashes, bruises, or line marks.

Video or photographs are extremely valuable, especially close ups of the areas around the tail stock, flukes, flippers, and any injuries

Dead right whales

- T Throat grooves absent (belly may have white patches or be completely black)
- T Flippers squarish in shape and, when the whale is belly-up, both may be up out of the water
- T If floating on its side, note strongly arched mouth that contains long (6+ foot) baleen



Dead right whale (tail closest)
NEFSC/Sea Sampling

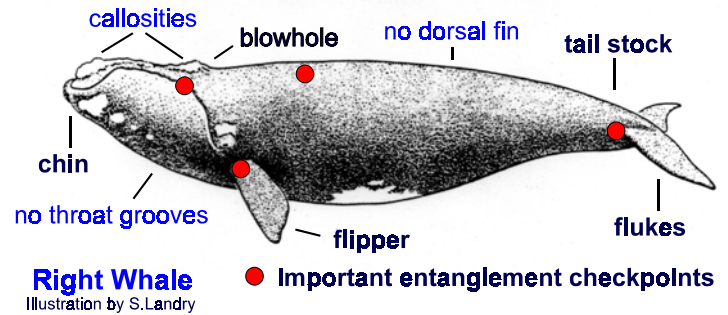


Dead right whale (head to the left)
NEFSC/Sea Sampling



Dead right whale aerial (white marks on back are gull-related)
Center for Coastal Studies

The right whale illustration below shows both important entanglement checkpoints, and the primary body features mentioned. Key right whale features are highlighted in blue font.



Right Whale

Illustration by S.Landry

● Important entanglement checkpoints

Dead humpback whales

- T Throat grooves present
- T Flippers white and about 1/3 the length of the body with knobby bumps on front edge
- T Trailing edge of tail flukes ragged-looking with large barnacles on tips
- T Several grapefruit-sized knobby black bumps on chin and snout



Dead humpback whale (head to the left)

NERO/PRD

Dead finback whales

- T Throat grooves present (narrower and more numerous than on humpbacks)
- T Flippers smooth, slender and fairly short
- T Tail flukes have smooth trailing edges and taper to narrow pointy tips
- T Chin smooth and relatively slender



Dead finback whale (head to the right)

NEFSC/PSB

Dead minke whales are physically similar to finbacks, but are smaller (less than 30 feet long) and their throat grooves do not extend as far aft

A good reference for identifying other species is [Guide to Marine Mammals & Turtles of the U.S. Atlantic & Gulf of Mexico](#) (c) 1999. Rhode Island Sea Grant. To order, phone 401-874-6842.

(space below provided for sighting notes)

Time: **Location (lat/long):**